



OFFICE of INTELLIGENCE and ANALYSIS

INTELLIGENCE IN DEPTH

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TERRORISM

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Heightened Domestic Violent Extremist Threat to Persist in 2021

~~(U//FOUO)~~ *Scope Note:* This Intelligence in Depth assesses key developments in the domestic violent extremist (DVE) landscape during 2020 and forecasts how these developments might evolve over the next year. This assessment does not provide a comprehensive review of all domestic threats but complements other products that provide more general overviews of the totality of the domestic terrorism landscape.

~~(U)~~ Key Judgments

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ The DVE threat in 2020 was comprised of a diverse set of ideological actors largely motivated by violent anti-government or anti-authority narratives, periods of prolonged civil unrest, and conspiracy theories. Law enforcement and symbols of government were the primary targets for DVEs, a trend that we assess will continue in 2021 and could escalate to include targeting of critical infrastructure.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ We assess that the “boogaloo” concept poses a threat, building on momentum gained throughout 2020 as the concept evolved from a loose, online network into a movement including militia violent extremists and racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs), motivated by a belief in the superiority of the white race, who seek to mobilize followers to engage in an a notional civil war.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ RMVE attacks in 2020 probably were constrained by COVID-19 mitigation measures and law enforcement disruptions, but we continue to assess that RMVEs pose a lethal and persistent threat based on their calls for attacks and continued attempts to commit violence.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Information gaps and challenges associated with the individualized nature of radicalization could be partially mitigated with increased collaboration between law enforcement, terrorism prevention efforts, and private sector partners. We judge these partnerships would improve our ability to detect changes in DVE trends and provide early warning of potential attacks.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Anti-Government Grievances Fueled Domestic Terrorist Landscape in 2020

~~(U//FOUO)~~ We assess that violent anti-government narratives, the spread of online conspiracy theories, and prolonged periods of civil unrest contributed to an unprecedented DVE threat environment throughout 2020.^a Law enforcement and symbols of government emerged as the primary targets of domestic terrorist plotting in 2020, which contrasts with previous years in which the targeting of religious and ethnic minorities and ideological opponents was more prevalent. We assess that these trends will continue in 2021 and could escalate to include targeting of critical infrastructure, particularly as DVEs become increasingly mobilized to action by perceptions of government overreach and conspiracy theories.

- * ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Perceptions of government overreach associated with COVID-19 mitigation measures were associated with several high-profile DVE threats against government officials, including a militia violent extremist plot to kidnap the Governor of Michigan in October 2020, judging from media reporting. These grievances—in addition to historical drivers related to real or perceived firearms regulations, immigration reform, and partisan issues—probably will endure and could increase through 2021 as perceptions that potentially expanded efforts to contain COVID-19 represent renewed threats of government overreach.
- * ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Militia violent extremists and RMVEs are among a broad range of DVEs who cited conspiracy theories to justify attacks against primarily government personnel and facilities, critical infrastructure, and ideological opponents in 2020. Conspiracy theories alleging widespread fraud in last year's presidential election and calls for election-related violence have intensified since early November, resulting in threats against politicians and law enforcement nationwide and the violent breach of the US Capitol Building on 6 January.

b7E Per FBI

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] according to DOJ and media reporting. In mid-January 2021, suspected anarchist violent extremists exploited lawful protests in Seattle, Washington to set fires and damage federal buildings, including a courthouse, according to media reporting.

^a ~~(U//FOUO)~~ For a comprehensive review of domestic violent extremist movements, please see IA-47801-21 *Diverse Domestic Violent Extremist Landscape Probably Will Persist Due to Enduring Grievances*; for a review of threats in the aftermath of the US Capitol breach, please see IA-48719-21 *Domestic Violent Extremists Emboldened in Aftermath of Capitol Breach, Elevated Domestic Terrorism Threat of Violence Likely Amid Political Transitions and Beyond*.

~~(U)~~ Foreign Actors Amplifying Violent Extremist Narratives

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Some foreign actors attempted to amplify anti-government and anti-authority extremist narratives, sow discord, and probably incite violence throughout 2020. Iranian influence operations, in particular, sought to exploit civil unrest and political tensions surrounding the 2020 US election, including through the creation of a website threatening election officials and sending hoax e-mails intended to intimidate voters. We have no information indicating that foreign influence operations contributed to the heightened threat environment throughout 2020.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Growing Interest in “Boogaloo” Poses Enduring Threat to Law Enforcement

~~(U//FOUO)~~ ***We assess that DVEs’ growing interest in the boogaloo concept poses an enduring threat to law enforcement and government personnel, given the concept’s focus on impending violent conflict with the government and authorities.*** Last year, the boogaloo concept gained popularity primarily among militia violent extremists and some RMVEs, evolving from loosely aligned, online networks to radicalized individuals involved in several disrupted plots and lethal attacks. We judge the pool of violent adherents to this concept probably will continue to grow in the coming months, particularly among lone actors who perceive the Homeland as being vulnerable and close to collapse.

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ The boogaloo concept evolved from a primarily online concept to a movement that attracted and mobilized violent extremist followers in 2020, judging from a DOJ press release and media reporting related to militia violent extremist narratives. The boogaloo concept’s emphasis on impending civil war aligns with existing grievances and provides a newer framework to explain those grievances, mostly among militia violent extremists and some RMVEs.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Some high-profile incidents in 2020 underscore adherents’ willingness to plan lethal attacks against ideological opponents, law enforcement, and government officials. Two militia violent extremists affiliated with the boogaloo concept conducted lethal attacks against law enforcement officers in California on 29 May and again on 6 June.

b7E Per FBI

according to DOJ reporting.

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Boogaloo adherents’ use of mainstream social media platforms enables them to broaden their outreach, connect with likeminded individuals, and share tactical expertise, while reserving platforms they perceive as being more secure for operational planning or discussions, judging from law enforcement reporting. As of mid-January, a self-described boogaloo Telegram channel had more than 6,500 subscribers, many of whom were calling for revenge for the death of a woman who breached the US Capitol Building on 6 January, according to media reporting.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists Pose Long-Term Threat Despite Lack of Lethal Attacks in 2020

~~(U//FOUO)~~ We judge that RMVEs pose a persistent threat to religious, racial, and ethnic minorities and law enforcement personnel despite the lack of lethal attacks in 2020. RMVEs seized on current events to promote violent extremist narratives online and discussed opportunities to further their ideological goals, according to DHS and media reporting. Throughout 2020, RMVEs conducted assaults against lawful protestors, and law enforcement disrupted several potentially deadly plots, underscoring the enduring lethality of the RMVE movement.

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ We judge that law enforcement disruption of RMVE plotting and the lack of opportunistic targets due to COVID-19 mitigation measures, including restrictions on large gatherings and religious services, limited the movement's lethality in 2020. Prior to 2020, RMVEs were consistently the most lethal and among the most active DVE threats for several years. RMVEs conducted two lethal attacks in 2019, resulting in 24 deaths, and five lethal attacks in 2018, resulting in 16 deaths, according to an I&A review of domestic terrorism attacks since 2018.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ RMVE narratives throughout 2020 called for a broad range of attacks against law enforcement and racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, including the use of chemical nerve agents and weaponized COVID-19, according to DHS reporting. RMVEs also sought to incite violence throughout periods of civil unrest, encouraging social media users to escalate tensions and promoting tactics intended to harm lawful protestors, according to media and DHS reporting.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Some RMVE threats against critical infrastructure in 2020 were designed to incite chaos and civil conflict, which we judge is consistent with RMVE efforts to disrupt social institutions, sow discord, and ultimately incite racial divisions. A disrupted RMVE plotter in March 2020 aimed to exacerbate public anxiety over the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting an explosives attack against a healthcare facility in Missouri, which we judge could have disrupted the facility's ability to treat patients and potentially could have resulted in mass casualties.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Decline in Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremist Travel to Foreign Conflicts

~~(U//FOUO)~~ Some RMVEs have traveled to fight and network with likeminded individuals in foreign conflict zones, such as Ukraine. We judge this activity declined in 2020 in part due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, a reported stalemate in the Ukrainian conflict, and prolonged civil unrest providing opportunities for involvement in a perceived domestic conflict. Ukraine had been a focal travel destination for some RMVEs who identified with the cause, sought combat experience, and, in some cases, were being recruited by Ukrainian groups, according to media reporting.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ DHS Opportunities to Address Collection Gaps

~~(U//FOUO)~~ *Intelligence gaps on DVE activities and the individualized nature of the radicalization and mobilization process limit our ability to warn of changes to the domestic terrorism threat environment.* Increased collaboration with federal, state, and local law enforcement partners could help identify opportunities to improve collection and enable ideological attribution of attacks and disrupted plots. Further engagement with terrorism prevention officers and private sector partners could strengthen efforts to develop domestic terrorism indicators and identify and suppress online violent extremist content.

- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Domestic violent extremism analysis draws upon social media collection, largely through existing federal programs and investigations. The fragmentary nature of social media makes attributing violent content to specific ideologies or even individual users difficult. Better coordination with law enforcement partners to combine insights obtained through social media reporting with information collected in subsequent field investigations could help enhance collection efforts and improve the US Government's ability to identify and warn of changes to the DVE landscape.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Federally supported local prevention programs may provide opportunities for partners to better understand community-specific grievances. Analysis and dissemination of DVE mobilization trends can help local prevention officers identify and off-ramp individuals who could be receptive to DVE messaging.
- ~~(U//FOUO)~~ Recent content removal by mainstream social media companies constrains DVEs' ability to recruit online, pushing some to move to more secure platforms, challenging our ability to identify and warn of specific threats. Existing partnerships with international and private sector partners through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, Tech Against Terrorism, and a variety of counter-messaging working groups provide opportunities to coordinate efforts to prevent DVEs' use of the internet to incite and commit violence.

Source, Reference, and Dissemination Information

Source Summary Statement

~~(U//FOUO)~~ We have **high confidence** in our assessments related to domestic terrorism drivers, the growth of the boogaloo concept, and the enduring threat of RMVEs. Our analysis is based on DHS open source reporting, DOJ press releases, and press reporting. Although DHS reporting is often fragmentary and difficult to corroborate, the DOJ and press information cite government and law enforcement investigative information that enhances insights into domestic terrorist trends and, in some cases, fills in these information gaps. Our assessment could change if we were provided additional or new information outlining other driving motivations behind 2020 domestic terrorism incidents.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ We have **medium confidence** in our assessment that our ability to warn of changes to the domestic terrorism threat in the Homeland is limited by the intelligence gaps in domestic terrorism reporting and the individualized nature of the radicalization and mobilization process. This assessment is based on opportunity analysis of existing collection gaps. Increased DHS collection on domestic terrorism and increased collaboration across the DHS enterprise on domestic terrorism could increase our confidence in this assessment.

Definitions

~~(U//FOUO)~~ **Anarchist Violent Extremists:** Any individuals who seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, to further their opposition to all forms of capitalism, corporate globalization, and governing institutions, which they perceive as harmful to society. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ **Anti-Government/Anti-Authority Violent Extremism:** Threats encompassing the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas, which are deemed to derive from antigovernment or anti-authority sentiment, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies; or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ **Boogaloo:** A term used by some militia violent extremists and RMVEs to reference a violent uprising or impending civil war. While RMVEs typically use the term to reference an impending race war or other conflict that will lead to the collapse of the "system," including the US Government and society, militia violent extremists use the term to reference an impending politically motivated civil war or uprising against the government following perceived incursions on constitutional rights, including the Second Amendment, or other actions perceived as government overreach.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ **Domestic Violent Extremists:** The FBI and DHS define domestic violent extremists (DVEs) as individuals based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seek to further political or social goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute violent extremism and may be constitutionally protected.

~~(U//FOUO)~~ **Lone Offender:** An individual motivated by one or more violent extremist ideologies who, operating alone, supports or engages in acts of unlawful violence in furtherance of that ideology or ideologies that may involve influence from a larger terrorist organization or a foreign actor.

	<p>(U//FOUO) Militia Violent Extremists: Any individuals who seek, wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence, to further their belief that the US Government is purposely exceeding its Constitutional authority and is attempting to establish a totalitarian regime. Consequently, these individuals oppose many federal and state laws and regulations, particularly those related to firearms ownership. MVEs take overt steps to violently resist or facilitate the overthrow of the US Government. The mere advocacy of political positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism and may be constitutionally protected.</p> <p>(U//FOUO) Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism: Encompasses threats involving the potentially unlawful use, or threat of force or violence, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas, which are deemed to derive from bias—often related to race or ethnicity—held by the actor against others, including a given population group.</p> <p>(U//FOUO) Radicalization: The process through which an individual changes from a non-violent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to affect societal or political change.</p>
Reporting Suspicious Activity	<p>(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement. Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx.</p>
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Homeland
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2. What is the highest level of intelligence information that you receive? Select One

3. Please complete the following sentence: "I focus most of my time on:" Select One

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	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N/A
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Product's relevance to your mission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Share with partners | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate your own topic-specific analysis |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Reprioritize organizational focus | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not plan to use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Author or adjust policies and guidelines | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> |

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7. What did this product *not* address that you anticipated it would?

8. To what extent do you agree with the following two statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
This product will enable me to make better decisions regarding this topic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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